United Nations A/AC.198/2007/2

General Assembly

Distr.: General
21 February 2007

Original: English

Committee on Information
Twenty-ninth session
30 April-11 May 2007

The network of United Nations information centres: activities and strategic directions

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The United Nations information centres are key to the work of the Department of Public Information, giving its global work a local accent. The reforms undertaken by the Department over the past five years have resulted in the adoption of a more strategic approach to its work, which includes developing communications strategies with clear goals and key messages. The information centres play a central role in the overall implementation of this strategy. With the renewed emphasis on greater United Nations system-wide coherence, the centres are likely to be playing an ever more important role in communications at the country level. The present report, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 61/121, summarizes the activities of the network of information centres and outlines the steps taken by the Department to give them an enhanced role in implementing the new strategic approach to promote the work of the United Nations among its key constituencies at the national, regional and subregional levels.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 61/121 the General Assembly emphasized the importance of the network of United Nations information centres in enhancing the public image of the Organization and in disseminating United Nations messages to local populations. The Assembly recognized that the network of United Nations information centres, especially in developing countries, should continue to enhance the impact and activities of the Organization, including through strategic communications support, and called upon the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of that approach. The Assembly also stressed the importance of rationalizing the network of United Nations information centres and requested that the Secretary-General continue to make proposals in that direction and report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-ninth session.

2. The present report summarizes the activities undertaken by the network of United Nations information centres, particularly in the area of communications campaigns, and provides an update on the measures taken by the Department over the last year to strengthen the centres through a new strategic approach that emphasizes the optimal use of available resources to achieve a greater overall impact.

II. United Nations information centres: a key resource in mobilizing public opinion

3. The reform undertaken by the Department of Public Information over the past five years has resulted in the adoption of a more strategic approach that includes developing communications strategies with clear goals and key messages and identifying target audiences. The United Nations information centres are key to the work of the Department, giving its global work a local accent. With the renewed emphasis on greater United Nations system-wide coherence, the information centres are likely to be playing an ever more important role in country-level communications.

A. Communications campaigns

4. Bolstered by the more prominent role assigned to them, the information centres have emerged as crucial players in promoting United Nations priority issues at the national level. The contemporary world is characterized by fast communications and highly developed technologies, which require enormous financial resources to achieve maximum benefit. Even with such resources, taking language and culture into consideration, to name just two of the most obvious elements that vary from place to place and have significant impact on communications efforts, it is never certain that local markets are adequately covered. This is where information centres make a most important contribution to the global efforts of the Department of Public Information. By translating communications materials into local languages, organizing events within communities, approaching opinion-makers and placing op-ed articles by senior United Nations officials in national publications, they provide a crucial link between the development and successful execution of a communications campaign. The activities of the centres are also critical to the increasingly important evaluation of the effectiveness of the Department's communication activities. Pilot projects such

as media coverage analysis are gradually becoming a feature of the Department's work, both at Headquarters and in the field. This exercise, carried out with the assistance of the information centres, allows the Department to have a clearer and more accurate understanding of the results of its communications efforts and provides information that may prove useful in future communications campaigns.

5. The key role of information centres in "getting the message out" is now incorporated into communications strategies from the start-up of many campaigns. Based on improved evaluation methods showing that outreach achieves greater media coverage and impact, as well as meeting strategic goals, specific messages and information materials are increasingly tailored to regional audiences.

6. Following are examples of such work carried out by the information centres over the past six months:

- The *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2007* was launched in New York on 10 January 2007. In preparation for the launch, working in close collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Public Information drafted press releases for both the global launch and regional launches. Working with specific information centres, the regional launches were carried out in a number of locations, including Bangkok, Beirut, Mexico City, Moscow and Pretoria. Although the main launch took place two days before the regional launches, the latter received extensive media attention because press releases and presentations of the report by economists at the various centres focused specifically on the economic prospects of the specific region.

- The advance planning for the launch of the 2006 report of the Secretary-General on international migration and development (A/60/861) involved the information centres from the start, as the migration issue has different dimensions in different regions. In addition to global messages and materials, regional fact sheets were produced for use by information centres in their media outreach and report launch events. The role of the centres in monitoring media messages was also critical. More than 60 per cent of the 170 media clips collected by the Department of Public Information were in outlets that participating centres had targeted.

- For Human Rights Day 2006, the information centres successfully placed an op-ed article by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on human rights and poverty in 30 publications in 27 countries, including the *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, China), *The Scotsman* (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), *Die Presse* (Austria), *The Standard* (Zimbabwe), *La Libre Belgique* (Belgium), *Milenio Diario* (Mexico) and *Folha de São Paulo* (Brazil).

B. United Nations Communications Group at the local level

7. The United Nations Communications Group, the global communications platform of the United Nations system formed six years ago, has emerged as a vital tool in the implementation of the Organization's communications strategies on its priority issues. Now, with the creation of communications groups at the country

level, the information centres have become an important player in this well-knit and carefully designed communications approach.

8. In 2005, at their annual meeting, members of the Communications Group concluded that the success of the Group's efforts had been largely determined by its ability to coordinate activities at the country level. It was necessary, therefore, to establish communications groups at the country level wherever entities of the United Nations system were at work. Based on a standard operating model agreed upon at the global level by principal members of the Group, United Nations country teams were invited to establish local chapters, bringing together the entire United Nations system under a communications umbrella.

9. The information centres are given an important role in the functioning of the communications groups at the country level. Under the agreed operating model, in countries hosting an information centre, the communications group would be chaired by the Director of the centre, or, in the absence of a Director, the most senior Information Officer of any United Nations entity represented on the United Nations country team. The information centres would also act as the secretariat of the local group. In countries with no information centre, the Resident Coordinator of the country team is to designate a communications focal point from any United Nations entity within the team, to carry out such functions. Communications groups at the country level have now been created in over 60 countries, in most cases with information centres taking the lead.

10. The creation of the United Nations Communications Group has contributed to the strengthening of a cohesive and integrated image of the United Nations. Several local communications groups have reported that their activities have given higher visibility to the work of the country teams and increased the coherence and unity of its messages. Through pooling of resources and information-sharing, the Communications Group has been able to provide ongoing collaborative analysis of the national media environment and to undertake appropriate media responses. Some local groups have produced national communications strategies and workplans and have established year-long calendars of events, updated periodically and amended as needed. Media outreach initiatives have been particularly successful with several local groups reporting weekly radio and television programmes, joint media encounters, field trips to United Nations projects and public service announcements. Some have also initiated joint advertising campaigns, inter-agency exhibits and book fairs. Most importantly, as a result of close cooperation among United Nations communicators, there is now a clear recognition within the country teams about the importance of communications as a key factor in the implementation of the United Nations development agenda and its overall work at the country level. This is the beginning of a new culture of communications within the United Nations system.

Box 1

- In Burkina Faso, United Nations system partners, under the aegis of the local communications group, have begun producing a common newsletter, replacing the half a dozen or so newsletters that once touted the work of each individual agency. Similarly, the local communications group in Pakistan has started producing a United Nations system newsletter
- In Senegal, United Nations partners have joined hands to produce regular radio and television programmes
- In Cape Verde, partners of the communications group have set up a United Nations system common library; in Mauritania, they have established a United Nations documentation centre with media monitoring as its primary objective
- In Japan, communications group partners joined together in December 2006 to celebrate the "50 years of the United Nations and Japan". The event's main attraction, a live talk show by United Nations staff members from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United Nations Volunteers who had recently returned from the field received extensive coverage in the local media
- In the Russian Federation, a common communications group website (www.unrussia.ru) has over 1,000 visitors per month

C. Partnerships

11. As with the Department of Public Information at the global level, the United Nations information centres increasingly rely on the local network of non-governmental organizations, civil society groups and private sector entities to re-disseminate United Nations messages, connect with targeted audiences and implement issue-based campaigns. Using the creative energy and collective resources of such groups, the information centres are able to organize special events, publish local language materials and connect with new audiences, often in remote and outlying areas. Some examples are set out here:

- On the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day (27 January), the United Nations Information Service at the United Nations Office at Vienna organized a series of events, including a German version of an exhibit, "No Child's Play", created by Yad Vashem. Activities by other centres include: a series of educational and interactive outreach programmes titled "Hannah's Suitcase", with the participation of survivors of the Holocaust (Prague); a round-table discussion with the participation of local authorities and survivors of the Holocaust, in cooperation with the Israelite Federation (Rio de Janeiro); and a national poster competition, in cooperation with the Shalom Foundation (Warsaw).

- The World Federation of United Nations Associations held its thirty-eighth plenary assembly from 6 to 11 November 2006 in Buenos Aires, at which the Associations adopted the Buenos Aires Declaration, reaffirming the purpose of the World Federation as "a peoples' movement for the United Nations". The information centres in Mexico City and Buenos Aires took part in the Assembly and made a presentation on partnership opportunities between United Nations Associations and the information centres. As a result of the encounter, the information centre in Mexico City is developing an outreach programme aimed at United Nations Associations in Latin America.

- In countries with peacekeepers serving various United Nations missions, information centres often partner with local authorities to promote the United Nations message on peace. On the occasion of the International Day for United Nations Peacekeepers (31 May), several information centres arranged special events, including displays and seminars, in association with local government authorities and civic groups. In November 2006, the information centre in Lima organized a workshop with 200 Peruvian soldiers who were about to join the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Also in November, a group of Indian army officers visited the information centre in New Delhi to learn about the United Nations and its peace operations. A similar visit was organized last year by the information centre in Ouagadougou for officials of Burkina Faso's Ministry of Defence.

12. The information centres provide a crucial link between the Department of Public Information and local civil society groups in reaching out to African students through the expanded use of the Internet. Building on the success achieved at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis 2005, the Department, through its Global Teaching and Learning Project, organized two video chats, in partnership with the information centres in Senegal and Cameroon and the International Education and Research Centre (iEARN) youth leadership conference, held in Enschede, the Netherlands, during the 2006 World Cup, to talk about the link between sports for peace and development. A third live video chat was organized in January 2007 with the information centre in Yaoundé to help celebrate National Youth Day, giving young people the opportunity to discuss projects they are developing to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals with the Director of the New York Office of Sport for Peace and Development. Discussions are under way to expand this new communication tool, which has been integrated into the United Nations cyberschoolbus website (http://cyberschoolbus.un.org), to information centres around the world, thereby increasing their access to the United Nations system.

13. The information centres, in cooperation with local educational non-governmental organizations, are also promoting model United Nations programmes, an educational activity focusing on learning about the United Nations and its work. The information centre at the United Nations Office at Nairobi is supporting two separate model United Nations that will take place in March 2007.

Box 2

- The East African model United Nations (a four-day conference) will bring together about 800 student delegates from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.
- The Kenya model United Nations will be attended by about 300 to 400 students (a four-day conference) from about nine local universities. The project was initiated by the information centre in Nairobi in 2002.

III. Progress in further rationalizing the way the United Nations information centres work

14. In its effort to redefine the role of the information centres and to make them a more effective vehicle for the United Nations global communications efforts, the further rationalization of the network of information centres remains a central focus of the Department of Public Information. Working within the parameters of resources at its disposal, the Department has continued a three-pronged approach: a strategic realignment of its resources to better meet its changing communications needs in the field; expanded use of the latest information technology; and working together at the regional level for greater impact.

A. Strategic realignment of resources

1. Redeployment and strengthening of staff resources

15. As reported in the 2006 report of the Secretary-General on the continued rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres,[1] the Department is seeking to strengthen its presence in major media hubs, while giving centres in those locations a greater coordinating role at the regional level. During the period under review, the newly appointed Directors (D-1) of the information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria have assumed their functions. In addition, to enhance the ability of these offices to achieve greater coordination of communications activities at the regional level, each of these centres has been strengthened through the redeployment of P-4 Information Officer posts. These new positions have been filled.

Box 3

To enhance the ongoing web development in the respective regions, a webmaster post has been added to the staffing of the information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria, supplementing the centrally coordinated efforts to promote local web development and apply the latest information technology to the Department's operations in the field.

[1] A/AC.198/2006/1.

16. The Department expects that it will soon receive the approval of the Office of Human Resources Management for the classification of a number of existing National Officer posts (at the NO-C level) for those information centres where the national officer is the most senior staff member. This will more accurately reflect the level of their responsibility and will strengthen the Department's key role within local United Nations country teams on communications matters.

2. New opportunities for staff development and training

17. Providing field staff in various occupational groups with training opportunities to update their professional skills remains a priority for the Department. In addition to providing support for staff participation in locally available training courses aimed at upgrading their communications and information technology skills, the Department continues to look into ways to enable various categories of its field staff to take part in relevant training programmes organized regionally or locally.

18. The Department also expects to include several reference assistants from information centres in Asia and the Pacific in a regional workshop for United Nations depository librarians scheduled to take place at the headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok in the second half of 2007. To supplement these efforts, all centres have received a DVD containing the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre (DHLink) training materials available electronically.

19. An important objective of these efforts is to equip the Department's field staff with the expertise to train their local constituencies, including depository librarians, where appropriate, in the use of the DHLink's electronic resources. This is a meaningful step towards the transformation from "collections to connections", including in the field, where this process is slower owing to limited access to the Internet.

20. The Department is also exploring the possibility of offering appropriate group training opportunities to its administrative support staff in its field offices to bring them up to speed on a broad range of administrative rules, regulations and procedures.

Box 4

- With the generous extrabudgetary support from the Government of the Dominican Republic, several reference assistants from information centres in Latin America took part in the Regional Caribbean Workshop for Depository Librarians, held in Santo Domingo in January 2007, with the participation of trainers from the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre.
- Partnering with the Office of Human Resources Management, the Department has provided the staff of the United Nations information centres, Services and offices with about 3,000 online tutorials covering a variety of job-related skills and competencies, in addition to some 1,200 online books, to supplement limited training funds available from the regular programme budget.

21. The Department has continued to provide training for newly appointed information staff (for example, Directors of the information centres and locally recruited information professionals) both at Headquarters and at other venues, including centres in neighbouring countries where communications issues and concerns may be similar, in order to update them with regard to the Department's strategic planning, communications priorities, techniques and approaches, as well as to exchange lessons learned and best practices.

3. Strategic realignment of operational funds

22. While consideration is being given to the proposals from the information centres for their 2007 communications activities, the Department is continuing its efforts to ensure that a greater portion of its operational resources are allocated to fund these activities, which are achieving greater visibility for the work of the Organization among the key audiences in those countries. The continued support of host Governments in alleviating the high cost of rent and maintenance in some locations is very much appreciated, as this allows the centres to utilize the limited resources available to them for outreach activities. During 2006, the Governments of Australia and of Trinidad and Tobago, through generous extrabudgetary contributions, assumed the responsibility for the payment of rent for the premises of the United Nations information centres in Canberra (relocated from Sydney) and Port of Spain.

23. The Department would like to acknowledge, with gratitude, the support of the majority of host Governments of United Nations information centres and several others in providing extrabudgetary support to United Nations information centres, including the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe in Brussels, thereby strengthening their ability to more effectively reach the audiences in the countries served.

24. With regard to other locations hosting United Nations information centres where the cost of rent and maintenance continues to consume a significant share of their respective operational funds, the Department will renew its approach to the host Governments concerned with a view to securing extrabudgetary contributions and support, as appropriate, to supplement the regular programme budget and to increase the availability of resources for outreach activities to key local audiences.

IV. Upgrading the use of information and communications technologies

Providing centres with new equipment

25. Given the need to meet the basic overhead and operational expenditures of information centres, including rental and maintenance of premises, utilities, communications costs and cost recovery fees to UNDP, few resources remain in their regular allotment to carry out the systematic equipment replacement exercise required for the network. Despite this, efforts have continued to identify ways and means of maximizing the use of the latest available information and communications technology.

Website

26. Development of websites in languages spoken by the local audiences in the countries covered by the United Nations information centres, Services and offices is a crucial component of the Department's communications efforts at the field level. By pooling the information technology expertise of the Information Centres Service at Headquarters and the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe in Brussels, and working together as a virtual team, the Department has introduced and implemented a web content management system, which is hosted in Brussels. The aim is for all 63 United Nations information centres, services and offices to have operational websites by April 2007. This will allow visitors to learn about the work of the United Nations, both globally and at the local level, and in the local languages, wherever appropriate. The redeployment of webmaster posts to the United Nations information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria will further strengthen this virtual team of information technology specialists, facilitating further web development and maintenance in these regions.

Box 5

Forty-seven United Nations information centres currently maintain websites in 5 official (Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish) and 29 non-official languages (Armenian, Bahasa, Bangla, Belarusian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Farsi, Finnish, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Kiswahili, Japanese, Malagasy, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu and Uzbek).

Internal communications

27. All 63 field offices now have access to iSeek, the Secretariat Intranet, until recently available only to staff at Headquarters locations, which provides them with ready access to a wealth of valuable information. The Department also continues to develop StratCom, its internal interactive strategic communications network. In addition to being the main repository of internal programmatic and administrative guidance and information, StratCom is also used to integrate the work of information centres, services and offices with the work done at Headquarters and to link them directly to each other, while also providing for their direct access to the website of the United Nations Communications Group.

Information management

28. The Department is currently working on an information management tool that will enable information centres, Services and offices to manage the explosive growth of electronic and non-electronic data through the introduction of an online database system. As part of this initiative, many routine administrative procedures will also be computerized, enabling field offices to streamline information-sharing and administrative and reporting procedures and to make them more user-friendly. This new tool will enable efficient data collection, validation and processing, thus eliminating redundant data and duplication of processing efforts, both at Headquarters and in the field.

E-mail communications

29. With nearly half of its staff located in field offices, e-mail has evolved into a critical, cost-effective communications tool for the Department. However, owing to the lack of a reliable local information and communications technology infrastructure, some information centres continue to experience e-mail outages on a regular basis. In addition, owing to operational realities on the ground, information centres use commercial e-mail providers under various e-mail domain names, as a result of which there are no standard e-mail addresses and the potential for loopholes in data security. Building on advances in communications and e-mail hosting technologies, the Department is currently undertaking an initial analysis to identify a reliable, secure and cost-effective e-mail system, which should result in the development of a unified, coherent, accessible and easily identifiable e-mail address for all the staff in information centres, Services and offices, thereby strengthening the common identity of the United Nations at the field level.

Use of other electronic information resources

30. Through the Consortium and Collections Unit in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre, the Department is exploring the possibility of providing its field offices with access to: various commercial electronic databases, covering such subject areas as peace and security, disarmament, legal issues, news and current events and social affairs and politics; reference works such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias and manuals; and scientific and academic research, as well as various regional resources.

V. Working together at the regional level for greater impact

A. The role of United Nations information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria

31. As reported last year in the Secretary-General's report on the continued rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2006/1), the Department has strengthened the leadership of the information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria in an effort to rationalize the work of the centres and maximize resources. Emphasizing the leading role of these centres, which are located in major media hubs, the Department has assigned them additional responsibilities with regard to other, often smaller centres in their respective regions, including:

(a) Assisting information centres and country teams in the region in promoting United Nations issues and priorities;

(b) Facilitating the work of the other information centres in the region by assisting them in strategic thinking and communications planning, sharing plans, ideas and best practices;

(c) Making suggestions on programme delivery and providing feedback to the Department at Headquarters;

(d) Facilitating and coordinating the exchange of information and ideas among the information centres in the region through regular dialogue and consultation and by assisting them with troubleshooting and problem-solving;

(e) Developing working relationships with regional media, nurturing joint regional approaches with United Nations system regional communications focal points and advising the Department at Headquarters on regional approaches to priority issues.

32. While there is added emphasis on the work of the information centres at the regional level, it is of primary importance that information centres in the region add value to promoting communications at the country level, within the country teams and local communications groups.

33. There are early indications that this approach is contributing to greater coherence in the Department's response to communications challenges and opportunities. The role of the Department within the United Nations country teams has been strengthened, as witnessed by the fact that Directors of the information centres are increasingly being invited to participate in the periodic retreats and workshops of United Nations country teams in the region. This has also led to the fostering of team spirit and mutual professional partnership, including through ongoing dialogue, sharing of experiences and lessons learned and discussions of the best approaches to regional communications challenges. The presence of dedicated senior United Nations communications in each of these regions has been well received by their counterparts in the United Nations organizations working at the field level and has positioned the information centres to carry out a key role as a resource and authority on regional communications strategies and approaches. The directors of the information centres in Cairo and Mexico City have led the way by convening regional communications groups, thus providing a forum for the discussion of common United Nations communications issues, concerns and opportunities in the respective regions and on the development of joint projects on key issues. The Director of the information centre in Pretoria, who was appointed more recently, is pursuing a similar course of action (see para. 37 below).

34. The regional United Nations communications focal points in the Arab region met in Cairo in June 2006 to establish a regional United Nations communications group. The group has drafted a regional workplan and has begun implementing a number of projects. In follow-up, in December 2006 the Director of the information centre in Cairo was invited to address the first meeting of United Nations resident coordinators in the Arab region and to lead the discussion on communications challenges, tools and advocacy of United Nations issues in the region.

35. At a meeting led by the Information Centre in Mexico City in July 2006, the United Nations communications group for Latin America and the Caribbean, representing 13 organizations of the United Nations system, was established. Among the regional communications initiatives undertaken over the last year, the 2006 "Stand Up Against Poverty" campaign, an initiative in support of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, brought together youth groups, schools, non-governmental organizations and the media and resulted in the holding of over 200 diverse events in 16 countries. The central Spanish language website of the observance, developed and hosted by the information centre in Mexico City, served as a one-stop venue for information about the campaign in the region.

36. The information centre in Pretoria is also expected to lead efforts to organize a regional communications group for sub-Saharan Africa. Among possible region-wide projects is the proposal to extend the very successful South African model United Nations programme for high school and university students to participants from other African countries and a broad-based regional communications campaign to promote the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals on the continent.

37. Given the importance of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which houses two major United Nations entities and a large cluster of United Nations offices, the Department is exploring the possibility of strengthening the information centre in Nairobi to allow it to play an enhanced role in communicating the substantive work of the Organization, to wider audiences in Kenya and beyond. In doing so, the Department would reinforce the centre's role as the coordinator of communications and public information for the United Nations at that location. The centre in Nairobi will also liaise with the centre in Pretoria, as appropriate, to discuss common communications strategies in the region and to maximize synergies wherever possible. With this aim in mind, consideration will be given to allocating additional resources to the information centre in Nairobi.

38. To discuss the parameters of this new approach to communications work at the field level and to clarify the scope of the role of the information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria with regard to the other centres in their respective regions, in December 2006, the Department convened a brainstorming session at Headquarters, which included the participation of the Directors of the three centres. The report of the High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence, in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment, "Delivering as one" (A/61/583), provided a basis for the discussions, with the objective of clearly positioning the information centres as the communications focal points within the United Nations country teams. The elements of this new approach were later shared with all United Nations resident coordinators in locations hosting United Nations information centres in the three regions.

B. Working together in Europe

39. To further enhance the effectiveness of its outreach in Europe, the Department, working through its three key communications offices in Brussels, Geneva and Vienna, introduced a number of innovative approaches to networking and cooperation. The ongoing dialogue between the three offices, which took into account their strengths and comparative advantages has resulted in the identification of several areas of cooperation.

40. In 2006, the three offices launched coordinated activities in the area of human rights. In Vienna, the focus of last year's annual journalists' forum was on human rights. The United Nations Information Service in Geneva worked with the Department at Headquarters to promote the work of the newly established Human Rights Council, organizing meetings with members of the media in advance of the Council sessions. The United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels also worked to publicize the issue of human rights, in cooperation with European Union institutions, think tanks and media outlets based in Brussels, developing a page dedicated to the issue on its website in 13 European languages. Taking advantage of

innovative approach taken by the Department to rationalizing its communications work through the strengthening of major media hubs has already reaped benefits, including the development of new partnerships and the sharpening of United Nations messages.

45. The Department of Public Information is taking a number of steps to further strengthen this process, including:

(a) Organizing a regional communications workshop for information centres in Latin America and the Caribbean, to take place in Sao Paulo, Brazil in the first half of 2007. It will focus on enhancing both internal and external partnership;

(b) Developing strategies to further rationalize the work of the United Nations information centres in Asia and the Pacific, taking into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region, as well as the geographical distance among the locations hosting United Nations information centres;

(c) Seeking to revitalize its partnership with UNDP and the United Nations Development Group office, which oversee and coordinate the work of the United Nations country teams in over 166 countries, in order to ensure the successful operation of the communications groups working at the country level. As part of this effort, the Department is seeking a review of the terms of reference for resident coordinators with regard to their communications responsibilities, in particular those who also serve as Directors of information centres. In undertaking these responsibilities, resident coordinators will be asked to ensure the establishment and continued functioning of a United Nations communications group to bring together the communications focal points for the United Nations system within the country team;

(d) Continuing to provide briefing material on key issues to resident coordinators on a regular basis.

VII. Conclusions

46. The work of the Department of Public Information is driven by clearly defined communications strategies that focus on targeted audiences, system-wide partnerships and increased use of new information and communications technologies. As the Department has evolved over the years, both in terms of what it does and how it does it, so have the information centres. Through the realignment of resources, the upgrading of their technological infrastructure, building partnerships at local and regional levels and ensuring regular interaction with Headquarters, the Department has sought to make the centres more effective and more relevant to the work of the United Nations at the country level. These efforts will continue as the Department strives to equip the centres for broader success.